

ORIGIN AND PROGRESS
OF THE
DRAMATIC ART IN FRANCE.

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DEDICATED
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Origin and Progress of the dramatic art in France.

The origin of the dramatic art is lost in the night of time. Traces of it are found among all nations, even in the remotest antiquity. The necessity of 'being occupied' so as to drive away the tediousness which attacks man every-where and at all times, gave birth in him to the taste of what we call the Arts, the highest perfection of which is but an imitation of Nature. Thus arose gymnastic exercises and scenic representations with the Greeks, and it is probable similar entertainments among all people since the first existence of society.

As the Romans were the imitators of the Greeks in the arts, so were the French the imitators of the former and especially in the dramatic art.

Two elements will in general be found to concur in the production of a new social fact — a spontaneous element and a traditional one; of this the rise and growth of the modern theatre afford a demonstration. The active principle of innovation was furnished by the church, the traditional element was found in the ancient drama.

As regards the spontaneous element, those who are aware that the ancient drama had a theocratic origin, will not wonder at finding the most vivid and most abundant source of the modern theatre in the monasteries of the IXth and Xth and in the antiphons and responses of the two following centuries, albeit the church ever since the constitutions of the apostles and the most ancient councils had shown herself anxious to condemn, and had striven hard to suppress scenic representations. But this is only a seeming contradiction. As in antiquity so it happened in the middle ages. In Greece the mysteries of Eleusis which contained the first germ of the theatric art, the religious instruction, the revelation of the dogma and the prayer, were mixed with ridiculous and terrible representations, and when the priesthood had renounced the monopoly of the arts, Thespis and Eschyle gave Greece a national theatre, although always partly religious.

The influence of the clergy on the drama and in general on poetry and arts, is not to be considered a peculiarity with the Greeks and Romans, it is a social, absolute and universal law, and a consequence of the theocratic condition.

In its earliest days the church set itself in opposition to the scenic representations of the gentiles, partly by reason of the austere and gloomy character of the doctrine of the Fathers, but chiefly because of the association of the ancient drama with pagan rites. During the sacerdotal epoch, the clergy was not contented to domeneer the intelligence, it attempted also to sub-

due and to master all human faculties, and in its hand the plastic, musical and mimic arts became so many instruments of seduction and power. Having once attained the predominance, the church continued to anathematize those who by facetious representations promoted idolatry in public places and in castles, but at the same time, it instituted figurative ceremonies, multiplied the processions and translations of relics, and instituted at last such offices as, in some measure, may be called dramas. Instead of celebrating the feasts, they were represented, and, as it were, played: Symbols and prayer were assisted by dramatic shows; at Christmas all the Evangelist relates of that sacred period, was placed dramatically before the people, the crib, the shepherds and the magi. At Ascension-day, a priest was seen on the exterior gallery over the portal, representing the ascension of the Saviour — all real mimic ceremonies which were for a long space of time the admiration of believers.

As preludes to the dramas of the middle ages may be mentioned the solemn processions to, and around the tombs of the martyrs, the funeral pomps with their psalmody and hymns, as also the agapes because of their evidently mimic character.

The dramatic Muse may also be recognized in those dumb shows which took place before and during the middle ages. A scene of Holy Writ or some event in the life of a saint, or those wonders of religion which the Muse was undoubtedly unable to explain in any other manner, were represented in a kind of tableau

vivant by disguised and costumed personages and this representation was often placed on a sort of wheeled platform and exhibited continually during those long processions which formed the principal feature of the festivities of ancient times.

As to the traditional element found in the antique drama, it was only the trivial and vulgar part of the latter, its mummeries and pantomimic plays which the French adopted directly they became acquainted with them, whereas it was not before the XVIth century that the French theatre begun to connect itself with the classic side of the ancient drama. The middle ages were ignorant of that grand theatre which ever since the time of Demosthenes had been in process of decay, and to which the asceticism of christianism and the innovation of the barbarians gave the mortal blow. The same happened with the Latin theatre which, without having been at any time very flourishing, went to decay with the Roman empire.

The excesses and abscenties in which the Roman theatre revelled, afforded to the christian authorities reason and opportunity to whelm in one sweeping condemnation all non-rèligious dramatic representations. The actors were no longer men who recited beautiful verses or noble maxims, they were buffoons and moun-tebanks who represented the devices of an impure imagination. Obscene to a degree that our modern imagination cannot conceive, this theatre shocked the chaste regards of that new christian people. The mere name of the theatre excited the indignation of the

bishops; and poets, actors and spectators were alike the objects of their censures. Even the so called apostate Julian condemned the then degraded theatre and when he attempted a restoration of paganism, one of his reforms was to forbid the heathen priests to frequent the theatre. Since the reign of Constantine the converted actors were not allowed to appear again on the stage, nor the judges to frequent the theatres except on festive days held in honor of the birth of the emperor or of his accession to the throne. But no condemnation whether by the church or by the government was able to destroy the theatre. The representations on public stages, it is true, became more and more rare, but as there were always people, slaves as well as free citizens, conquered as well as conquerors, who were greedy for scenic and other shows, the popular theatre did not cease at any time. Even when the church had become predominant the mummers and mountebanks like those of Hellas in ancient days, played an important part. They amused the mob in the streets and the rich in the palaces. The people was intoxicated by the licence of the theatre and at the same time by the pomp of the holy ceremonies. So it happens often in old societies, the elements whereof even the most opposite, exist side by side, being alike unable either to support or to destroy each other. The mountebanks and buffoons served as models in the mimic art, and thus the succession was continued between the plays of paganism and those of the christians and barbarians. Hence it is that so many heathen customs as

well as many follies crept into the christian practice; hence the plantation of trees, the cutting of branches, and thus, the christian feasts often coinciding with those of the gentiles, many of the rites of the latter were adopted by the christians who the less hesitated in doing so the more paganism decayed and the exercise of its customs became no longer synonymous with the confession of its faith. The church interdicted these practices in vain; heathen processions, masks and dances passed into the festivals of the church and gradually became assimilated with them, so that soon their origin was forgotten, and so, of necessity, the mixture of so many different elements produced many new forms in the religious rites, so it influenced also the formation of the christian drama. This mixture of christian and heathen rites gave birth to those festivals called "The festival of fools" and "The ass's feast." The first named of these called also "The festival du Deposuit", was, as it were, an illustration of the original equality of men, which established the antique Saturnalia and which idea corresponded to the principle of the christian church that all men are brethern. This principle was too dear to the poor and downtrodden people for them to allow of its being lost from their memory and customs. These holy-days were for the poor a sort of partial compensation for their close bondage, and they felt delighted to see the princes of the church putting off their dignities and surrendering the insignia of them to the humblest and lowliest who thus became for a short time abbots, bishops or even popes of the fools, while the

crowd repeated with enthusiasm three times running the words of the psalm: "He has put down the mighty from their seats and exalted them of low degree."

The ass's feast was celebrated twice a year, at about Christmas and midsummer; it was held in honor of that animal on which the Saviour had made his entrance into Jerusalem and on which Mary had fled to Egypt. Dressed as a priest and taught to kneel down, it was led to the altar, where a mass was said generally concluded by Y...a in the place of Amen. During the celebration of these feasts, the churches were in effect transformed into theatres, where ridiculous farces were played, where indecent dances were executed and where the holy vaults reechoed the most impious and scandalous songs. The actors, nearly all priests, were disguised, either masked or dressed as women, and surrendered themselves to an ecstasy which in general excited quarrels among them and rarely terminated without effusions of blood. About the midst of the XIIth century, the excesses had become so great that the bishop of Paris anathematized all these sacred plays which, however, he failed to suppress. They reappeared at different epochs in several churches of France, and persecuted and ambulant as they were, they held out during more than two centuries.

The crusades contributed no little to extend and to strengthen this kind of spectacles. They directed the general spirit of the French nation towards those holy places which excited to exstasy even holy palmers. Vows and pilgrimages became fashionable, every-where in the

public places and in the crossways there were troops of pious personages to be seen returning from Palestine. These pilgrims mounted upon scaffolds, sung spiritual songs composed during their travels, and played scenes representing some mysteries of religion or some episodes from the life of the saints to edify the minds or to get more alms in the towns they passed through.

The markets, fairs and those noisy meetings in the cloisters at the time of vintage provoked similar representations. In order to sell their wines to more advantage, the monks did not fail to attract and to amuse the purchasers by scenic entertainments.

In the intervals of the interminable banquets and festivities of those days, and in the later times in the entr'actes of the longer and more solemn moralities, were performed Interludes, a class of short composition in dialogue, merry and farcical in subject. The earlier of these interludes consisted of dancing or singing women clad only in a shirt, or a Bean-king or Child-tilt, a spinning wolf, a nightingale or other singing bird and later the life of the fox, first as a doctor, then as a clergyman chanting an epistle or the gospel, then gradually becoming bishop, archbishop and pope, and always eating hens and chickens. Other *entremets* represented the conquest of Jerusalem by Godfrey of Bouillon, or the taking of Troy by the Greeks.

Other forerunners of the drama were those pageants so often employed to gratify the vanity of citizens, or to compliment an illustrious visitor. Whether simply consisting of the exhibition on some lofty platform, in

the porch or churchyard of a cathedral, or in the Town Hall, of a number of figures suitably dressed or accompanying their action with poetical declamation and music, these pageants necessarily shared in all the changes of taste which characterised the age.

The prevalence of these representations evidently proves that the dramatic art was still in its infancy, it was the gross image of a coarse nature. What in its essential principles is calculated to edify and to amuse the people, what should concur to promote their civilisation and improve their customs, became more and more a means of corrupting them. Charlemagne felt this and was obliged to proscribe these plays. But in spite of these and other prohibitions the scenic entertainments did not cease. The people was too much accustomed to, and too fond of them, to consent to renounce them, as is evidenced by the fact, that when the barbarians had in any of their various incursions destroyed the theatre of some town, the affliction of the people was so intense as we are told by the historians of that time, that the regrets on account of the destroyed stages were nearly as great as those on account of their country being overrun and suffering from the depredations of savage enemies. A bishop even reproached the inhabitants of Trèves that after the retreat of the enemy who had destroyed their town and killed their most illustrious citizens, their first care and their first supplication to the emperor had been to restore the theatre. In short, the taste for scenic entertainments was general, and the clergy often vainly struggling against it, availed them-

selves of this propensity to represent the wonders of the creation and redemption by pictures and tableaux. The dramatic element in the church was more and more developed by hymns and antiphons as well as by speeches and many offices of the divine service. The priests while reading from the Bible, were accustomed to unfold a scroll on which the holy stories were represented. The transition to veritable dramatic representations of the holy events was thus easy. Though the original purpose of these representations, the edification of the people, was sometimes neglected, and though many jests were mixed with the religious offices, yet the church no longer absolutely condemned these dramas, but even promoted them, when their subject was religious. In the decrees and councils of that time they are called Mysteries and were considered to be of the same importance as the other offices of the divine service.

The most ancient mysteries are either written in Latin, or partly in Latin and partly in French. A mystery of the latter kind is "*les Vierges sages et les Vierges folles*" composed probably in the XIth century, in which the Provençal is the dialect employed. Another mystery written towards the end of the same century is entitled: "*Mysterium resurrectionis*", remarkable also by the stage direction: "*Primum procedunt tres fratres praeparati et vestuti in similitudinem trium Marium.*" All these pieces written mostly in a dead language, and composed by monks or priests who generally followed the text of the Bible with scrupulous fidelity, do not paint the customs of

the time they were written in. The real character of a people is shown in its literature only when its own vulgar idiom is employed; the artificial use of another alters, of necessity, the thoughts, feelings and impressions represented and conveyed, and for this reason these pieces had little influence on the manners and morals of the people.

By the XIIIth century, the ecclesiastical drama had been obliged to renounce the Latin language as its vehicle and to replace it by the vulgar idioms. The drama like other arts passed gradually from the hands of the clergy into those of lay corporations full of pious fervour and struggling for civil and religious liberty. The mysteries in the vulgar idiom having grown to a large number, and comprising a much greater number of *dramatis personae*, the roodloft, where the performances were originally held, was soon found too small to contain the increased number of performers, neither could the clergy provide all the actors; thus they found themselves obliged to remove the place of performance to the fore-court, and the increasing number of lay composers and actors formed themselves into the corporation known as the *confrérie*, which by degrees, removed those representations from the place and the ideas which had given them birth. This association established for pious and eleemosynary purposes, and having at first no hostile disposition towards the church, had by the latter part of the XIIIth century taken from the clergy a great part of its dramatic influence and entirely paralysed it in the course of the

XIVth. The tendancy of the theatre became more and more mundane and art came to supply the lack of religious fervour.

Under the influence of the *confrérie* the compositions were enlarged and embraced longer periods than before, as the whole life of the Saviour, or the whole religious history of man from the creation until the last judgment. Besides the holy characters, the imagination of the poet created others more popular and the plot shewd more life and reality; the mysteries, in short, gradually grew into a resemblance to the modern drama.

Induced by their great success, the pilgrims desired to form a permanent guild or society, but being without means wherewith to purchase ground for a theatre, they invited some artisans of Paris, masons, carpenters and others to join them by whom the necessary funds were willingly advanced. Thus was established one of the most celebrated dramatic societies, the before mentioned *confrérie*. It was in the village of Saint-Maur-des-Fossés, near Vincennes where they established their theatre, because the relics of two saints and a miraculous well made this place a rendez-vous of many devout pilgrims. The subject of the first mystery given in this theatre was the Passion of the Saviour. This play was at first given in passion-week and was repeated in consequence of its success. Soon after, some excesses committed by the crowd, induced the provost to forbid these representations. This, however, did not deter the actors; they adressed a petition to king Charles VI to reverse the prohibition, and this prince

eagerly seizing upon anything which promised to relieve the tediousness of his melancholy madness, ordered the mystery to be represented before him in order that he might pass judgment upon it. He was contented both with the play and with the actors, and out of gratitude authorized their establishment in Paris by letters-patent dated the 4th of Dec. 1402. By this grant the corporation called *Confrères de la Passion* from its first play, was allowed to play in Paris and its precincts and to wear its costumes even in the streets. At first they played on temporary stages erected at street corners or other open public places; later they established a permanent stage in the *Hôtel de la Trinité*, taking a lease of the greater portion of that hotel, where the theatre occupied a large room on the ground floor, 120 feet long, by 36 broad, having its roof supported by pillars. François I confirmed all the privileges they had obtained from Charles VI, and when in 1539 the *Hôtel de la Trinité* became again a hospital, they took on lease for four years a part of the *Hôtel de Flandres*. To avoid in future the expense of rent and of the frequent removal of their theatre, the *confrérie* purchased a part of the ground belonging to the *Hôtel de Bourgogne* and built there a theatre. Over the door of their play-houses they placed their arms: a cross with the instruments of the holy martyrdom, engraved on stone.

Following the example of Paris, the taste for dramatic entertainments grew rapidly in the provinces, and in the course of time, many places, such as Lyons,

Rouen, Metz and others possessed each its dramatic brotherhood.

The representations took place especially on the Thursday which preceded or followed the Feast of the three Magi, on May day and some time after the Montre générale. They also took place in honor of any great personage making his entry into Paris, or on account of a royal marriage, in honor of foreign ambassadors, the anniversary of any important religious event and on festivals commemorative of the birth or death of a saint. On the occasion of such anniversaries the personage or event commemorated, would naturally be represented in a visible form, with such details as either Scripture, legend or the imagination of the author could supply.

The authors of the first dramas are not all known to us. One of the most eminent was Jean Bodel. He composed amongst other pieces "le Jeu de Saint Nicolas" probably about 1260, after the first crusade of Saint Louis. His bad health not allowing him to partake in this enterprise, he indemnified himself as a poet, composing a real tragedy which secures to him the honor of the first dramatic monument of which the French literature can boast. Another dramatist, Adam de la Halle, surnamed le Bossu d'Arras, was a man of noble and for his time enlarged sentiment who exerted a sensible and beneficial influence upon his audience. Rutebeuf, also a dramatist of the XIIIth century, composed "le Miracle de Théoophile." These three poets were the first who gave arrangement and

form to the rude dramatic principles in vogue before their time. The author of the best of all the mysteries, the Mystery of the Passion, is unknown; it was revised by Jean Michel.

The titles of the above mentioned pieces indicate that the subjects of them were not taken only from Holy Writ; the whole world of legends was drawn upon. Pieces of the latter kind are the Miracles in which the miraculous deeds of the saints were placed dramatically before the people. Mysteries and miracles continued to be popular until the end of the XIVth century, but then, corresponding to a remarkable change in the genius of the French people they were gradually transformed into allegorical pieces called Moralities.

The rude imitations of nature which had pleased the gross appetites of a rude people, ceased now to gratify tastes sufficiently refined to feel disgusted with their former coarseness, but which had not yet the skill to discover the infinite and eternal beauties of the Cosmos. The faculties which lead to the combination of facts and to the deduction of consequences through the association of ideas, supplanted that primitive faith which had been content to hear and to believe. Allegory, the work of intelligence, of abstraction, of analysis took the place of coarse and inaccurate pictures which no longer corresponded to that which the audience imagined of nature and still less to nature herself.

An inclination for allegory is already perceptible in the XIIIth century, from which period dates a theological drama by Etienne Langton, in which Truth and

Justice accuse Adam of his fall, but Compassion and Peace plead in his favour. In the mysteries also we meet sometimes with allegorical figures, and this appearance may be considered the first stage in the process of secularizing the drama. This kind of dramatic representation seems to have become popular about the beginning of the XVth century, and to have gradually supplanted the exclusively religious mystery. It is evident that the composition as well as the representation of these pieces was far less in the hands of ecclesiastics than the earlier mysteries, who thus begun to lose that influence over the popular mind which they derived from their monopoly of this branch of art. The subjects of these dramas, instead of being purely religious were moral, as their name implies, and the personages of an abstract or allegorical kind. The different vices and virtues, Sin, Faith, Hope etc. played an important part, even the most abstract notions were personified and held edifying discourses and dialogues; not only the Well-Advised and the Badly-Advised, the Happy-End and the Unhappy-End, not only the Hope-on-a-long-life, the Shame-to-confess-his-sins, but even the blood of Abel, the More and the Less and the different tenses: *Regno, regnabo, Regnavi*. The French morality represents, in some degree, the tragedy of the Greeks and Romans; particularly because it treats of serious and important subjects; and if it were contrived in French that the conclusion of the morality should be always unfortunate, it would become a tragedy. In the morality noble and virtuous actions, either true, or at

least probable are treated so as to afford or at least are intended to afford instruction in moral duties. The action was in general exceedingly simple, and the tone grave and doctrinal, though, of course, the same necessity existed as before for the introduction of comic scenes. The devil was far too popular a personage to be suppressed, and his battles and scoldings with Vice dressed as a clown, offered always very mirthful scenes. As the mysteries were given by the *Confrères de la Passion*, so the moralities were more especially by the *Clerks de la Basoche**). This corporation, created by Philippe le Bel about 1303, enjoyed many privileges, grades and the right to name a chief called *Roi de la Basoche*. The members of this society, the *Basochiens*, were both authors and actors of the moralities, and being better educated than the *confrères*, put more art and judgment in their declamation and plays, and on this account earned the greater applause.

The *Basochiens* played also another kind of drama called *Farces*, the dawn whereof appears in some of the mysteries. When the people became tired of the latter, the *confrères de la Passion* were obliged to invent something new to attract the people back to them. To this end they introduced in their representations that gay and seducing aspect which so enchants the French, and farced their pious dramas with burlesque scenes.

*) *Basoche* derives from *basilica* i. e. in the Latin of the middle ages auditory.

This mixture of two different spectacles was called *Jeux de Pois-pilés*, because they were at first mostly given in a house having for its sign '*Poids en piles*'.

But moved either by religious scruples or by selflove of some sort, the *confrères de la Passion* hesitated to play the farcical parts, they therefore entreated a society of young Parisians, called *Enfants sans souci*, to play them, and this society took hold of this opportunity with pleasure to distinguish itself on the stage.

The farce is not always very distinguishable from comedy, but much shorter, admitting more buffoonery and destitute of any serious or practical end. It may be reckoned a middle link between the extemporaneous effusions of the mimes and the legitimate drama. The farces abound in jest and joviality. Some knavish trick, a love's artifice, a husband, a miser or a duped father are the usual themes of them. The French have a diverting specimen of this kind of drama which may be called the master-work of the comic Muse of that time, *Maître Patelin*, ascribed to Pierre Blanchet, and first printed in 1490, which contains strokes of humour which Molière would not have disdained. Most, however, of these farces, being the works of very inferior writers, who wrote only to gratify a fleeting humour of the time, are not worth reading except as illustrative of their age.

The *Enfants sans souci* before mentioned, genial and well educated as they were, gave birth to the so called *Sotties*. This society of young people sought to draw amusement from the faults and follies of mankind. Knowing that the fools have since Adam ever

been the majority, they called humanity *Sottise*, and knowing that it may be best managed by laughing at it, they established upon it an imaginary principality. Their chief was called *Prince de la Sottise* or *des Sots*, and after having easily obtained from Charles VI permission to represent their plays, they exhibited them on temporary scaffolds in public places. The *sottie* participates of the farce by its tone and of the morality by its allegory and has a satiric aim. Being more smooth, delicate and flippant and of a more direct railery than the farce, the *sottie* was from its commencement animated by that quick and biting spirit which afterwards inspired the political pamphlet. Neither religion, nor politics, neither public nor private life was secure from its attacks.

The *Basochiens* and the *Enfants sans souci* having evidently much affinity with each other, in order to avoid quarrels, agreed upon absolute liberty on each side. The king of the *Basoche* permitted the prince of the *Sots* to play farces and the latter permitted the former to represent *sotties*. Disputes between themselves were thus avoided. There were, however, dangers and struggles of another kind to be encountered. In the reign of Charles VII they were enjoined to play nothing without being expressly authorized. But the contravention of this ordinance being punished only by a light penalty, namely some days imprisonment with a bread and water diet, the actors did not care much for the prohibition. During the reign of Louis XI the penalties were made more severe and all actors who

played farces or sotties, or even solicited permission to play them, were threatened with confiscation, whippings and banishment. But Louis XII was very fond of these plays, and being desirous of hearing the truth, encouraged even those which shewed the abuses of his court, thinking that thus he would learn many things which it was impossible to hear otherwise. "I give them every liberty, said he, provided that they respect the honor of the ladies". He permitted the Basochiens to fix their stage up to that time ambulatory, on the great marble-dais in the large Hall of the Palais.

The most eminent of the *Enfants sans souci* is Pierre Gringore, known under the name of *Mère-Sotte* and *Prince des Sots*. He was alternately mountebank, undertaker of farces and sotties, herald of arms of the duke of Lorraine, afterwards ascetic rhymist and devotee, and at last tragic poet. In his plays he shows the spirit and sometimes the talent of a great writer.

As to the representations themselves, they required many and expensive preparations. There was nothing neglected that could strike or excite the spectators, even though enormous sums were necessary. A representation of the "Mystery of the Actes of the Apostles", in 1536, required several millions of francs to furnish it forth in all its magnificence.

Several days before the commencement of a play, especially if it required many *dramatis personae*, the chief officers of the society of actors by whom the representation was to be given, accompanied by some

of the king's officers, and by musicians, marched to the crossways, and there in the name of the king and of the provost raised the 'cry of play' and invited the actors to get, and learn their parts. This mode of advertising was the forerunner of the less noisy and not more efficacious modern system of announcement. In the cry to his "Jeu du Prince des Sots", Pierre Gringore addressed the public as follows:

*"Sotz lunatiques, sotz estourdis, sotz sages,
Sotz de villes, sotz de chasteaux, villages,
Sotz rassotez, sotz nyais, sotz subtils,
Sotz amoureux, sotz privez, sotz sauvages,
Sotz vieux, nouveaux, et sotz de toutes âges,
Sotz barbares, estranges et gentilz,
Vostre Prince, sans nulles intervalles,
Le Mardy Gras joïera ses Jeux aux Halles"*)*.

The chroniclers tell us that the representations of the mysteries were generally an important event for the whole province and even for the neighbouring provinces. In one remarkable instance, when "the Life of Saint-Martin by personages" was announced for representation in Seurre, the people was summoned to rest from work; "that not any body be so bold to do any mechanic work in the town during the three days that endured the representation of the mystery!"

When the parts were distributed by the mayor and the notables, all actors took an oath, and pledged their life and goods, well to study their characters, to con-

*) Parfaict, Histoire du théâtre français, vol. II, p. 183.

form conscientiously to the intentions of the author, to play their parts to the end of the play and to be present all the days appointed by the superintendents. They had to attend at the theatre by 7 o'clock in the morning and were fined 6 farthings for being late.

The profession of actor, exercised by many individuals with dignity and respectability, was certainly in France looked upon as an honorable calling. Several of the companies of actors were under the immediate patronage of the sovereign, and sometimes bishops, archbishops and even princely persons were seen on the stage. The female parts were in earlier times only acted by young men, but afterwards also by women. This innovation was at first considered as something shocking and monstrous, but the evident advantages and propriety of the change soon silenced all opposition. The novelty itself first originated in Italy. An old manuscript of Valenciennes tells, that "la Vierge Marie and several girls of Jerusalem were represented by Jennette Caraheu, Cécile Girard etc.*)".

All preparations made, the actors in their costumes marched, accompanied by a band, through the gaily decorated streets to the place where the stage was erected.

The cost of admission to the theatres was small, and seats could be reserved at a small additional charge. The exaction of a price of admission to the representations dates from the time of Charles VI. The author of the "history of Paris" tells us that Charles VI once in-

*) O. Leroy, *Etudes sur les Mystères*, p. 129.

tending to attend a representation was hindered doing so by some cause he does not say what, and the confrères having incurred large expenses for this representation, obtained from him the permission to take entrance-money. The total receipts at one of the representations of the Mystery of the Passion amounted on one occasion to 1480 livres, which shows that the number of the spectators must have been immense.

The time of beginning the representation varied; it depended upon the season, upon the play itself or other circumstances. Sometimes the performance begun between 7 and 8 in the morning and continued till 5 or 6 in the evening, or in the afternoon, and it is known that in Paris as well as in other towns, the clergy advanced the time for the evening service, in order to give the clergy and the people leisure to attend the theatre.

Some of the mysteries being of inordinate length, required several days even weeks for their representation, nevertheless the people like the Chinese at the present day, did not tire of them. When night interrupted the performance, it was resumed the following day or the next sunday, and no one was missed from his place. Louandre tells in his "Ancient and modern History of Abbeville and of its district" that when the mayor and aldermen of this town assisted at the dramatic representations, they ordered their meals to be brought them to their seats, at the expense of the town, and that, during the performance the doors were guarded by the day and night guards and by the sergents de

la vingtaine. He also relates that the price paid for a drama, had generally been about 110 francs.

In the mysteries the stage was generally divided into three platforms rising one over the other, which represented Heaven, Earth and Hell. Heaven was the highest and remotest; on it were represented God, angels and saints as well as allegorical figures, Peace, Mercy and others. Hell appeared in the lowest part of the stage under the form of a large dragon's mouth which opened when devils were to enter hell or to leave it. Purgatory, when it was necessary to have one, was placed over hell and constructed as a kind of prison having a large tower so constructed as to show the souls of the just groaning in limbo. Earth, situated on the groundfloor, between heaven and hell, represented the various places, where the action took place, houses, towns etc. There was also a kind of niche with curtains before it, which served to conceal, as it were, from the spectators certain details, for instance the delivering of the Virgin Mary. As to side-scenes there were none, but there were steps placed laterally on the right and on the left of the theatre, on which the actors sat down in the intervals of their performance. They were considered as not present while sitting there, and were not allowed to leave the stage until their roles were played out. In this manner, in the commencement of the performance the spectators saw all the actors who were to play, and since the number of the actors was generally very large, amounting sometimes to several hundreds, it was just that they should not be deprived of

the pleasure of witnessing the performance when not actually acting. The stage was high enough to be seen by all the audience and was separated from the latter by a balustrade. There were immense preparations in decorations and machinery. In a mystery exhibited at Metz an immense dragon, with eyes of polished steel, sprang out from hell and spread his wings so near to the spectators that they were all in consternation.

In point of costume very little attention was paid to chronological or national accuracy. The actors of all nations and countries were in general habited in the dress of the period and country in which the performance took place; it was usually rich and picturesque, and we may judge from the innumerable philippics of divines and moralists against the luxury of the actors, that a very considerable degree of splendour in theatrical dress was common. The employment of the contemporary costume in plays whose action was supposed to take place in foreign countries, naturally led to gross anachronisms and absurdities, but these anachronisms were not likely to strike in a very offensive manner the mixed and uncritical spectators of those times. There were, however, certain conventional attributes always associated with particular supernatural personages, such as angels, devils, ghoasts etc. Many of the costumes were furnished by the splendid contents of the vestry of the church.

The practice of representing the Deity in the costume and ornaments of a pope or a bishop seems to us an absurdity, even an irreverence, but was to be excused,

because the dress of those persons was then associated with ideas of the highest reverence. The devil generally appeared in a frightful guise, with a tail and cloven-footed; Vice in a checkered dress with a whip in its hand. The allegorical figures had signs such as had reference to their character, and sometimes when the character was not very clear, they had also inscriptions. In the play "the good judgment of the Virgin Mary" there appeared Noblesse with a sword in its hand, Clergy with two keys of gold, Merchandise with a balance and Labour with a spade. The sex of these allegorical personages was indicated to the spectator by their dress, males wearing comparatively short, females long clothes, also by their head gear.

Music without doubt played an important part in the performance, harmony or the science of counterpoint being at that time already known. The representation was preceded by an instrumental performance. During the short pauses between the scenes, or during the heavenly scenes the chanters, the choristers and the assistants intonated hymns and psalms, and when the performance took place in a cathedral, the large organ represented the effect of celestial harmony.

Besides the actors was a personage not properly belonging to the play, who sometimes introduced the performance in a prologue, often commented on obscure passages of Holy Writ and made moral remarks and often delivered an epilogue at the conclusion; this personage was called *Meneur du Jeu*. In the drama

of the Passion, at the end of the representation, he addresses the public as follows:

*“Puisqu’ avons eu temps et espace
De réduire en brief par escript
La Passion de Jesucrist,
Ayons-en recordacion,
Affin que par compassion
Puission mériter messouen,
Et en la fin, gloire. Amen*)”.*

After bowing to the audience, the actors begun to play either in one of the three principal regions, or even, according to the piece, in two of them at the same time, as was the case in the scene where the soul of king Herod, the murderer of the children, is seized by devils and carried away to hell, while at the same time the spectators witness his magnificent funeral upon earth. But what a difference between these plays and those of modern times! In the old plays there was much movement and action. Their authors, unable to invent appropriate dialogues for their characters, made them act. There was on the stage frequent going from one town, from one country to another, and the art of the actors and the decorations wonderfully assisted the conceptions of the dramatist. A most remarkable peculiarity of the dramatic profession at that time was the frequent combination, in one and the same person, of the qualities of player and dramatic author. Not all the actors were dramatists, but nearly all the dramatic authors were

*) Parfaict, Histoire du théâtre français, vol. I, p. 381.

actors too. The influence of this circumstance must have powerfully contributed to give to those productions that strong and individual character which renders them so interesting. But their zeal and desire accurately to imitate nature were often extravagant. The actors for instance who represented the Saviour on the cross or who played the part of Judas incurred serious risks from the perilous situations they assumed. In one of the Parisian mysteries, Saint Barbara is hung up by the heels on the stage, and after uttering her remonstrances in that unpleasant situation, is torn with pin-cers and scorched with lamps before the audience.

Every good play was rewarded by lively applause, but the representations were often disturbed by the spectators criticising in a loud voice the actors or the piece, or by the ostentatious arrival and presentation of strangers of high rank, during the play, or by beggars who took advantage of the multitude to glean a rich harvest of alms.

As to the arrangement of these pieces, their authors had no idea of plan and composition. Without dramatically joining the scenes, they generally followed their text, history or legend, book by book, chapter by chapter until the whole subject was exhausted, and the childish and straightforward art of these old dramatists felt no repugnance in following with strict literal accuracy every circumstance of the original narrative which they dramatized. Many of the longer pieces are divided into *journées* and required as many days as divisions, but even the single *journée* was often so much extended

that, at noon, the actors were obliged to pause for some hours, to rest a little. At the end of the first part of the Mystery of the Passion, the Conception, there is a summary, called Prologue finable which, of course, should have been called Epilogue, in which, as the name implies, all the events are resumed, and besides the spectators invited for the following day as follows:

“Et à tant, fin du premier jour.

Demain, retournez, s’il vous plaist:

Ne saurez estre sitost prest

Que nous ne viengnons acourant,

*Pour poursuivre au demourant *)”.*

Some dramatists did not care about dividing their pieces into journées, they left it to the convenience of the actors to stop where they liked, since there was no dramatic action to be interrupted. The pauses made in the first performance of a new piece, were perpetuated in future representations.

A great number of mysteries are either preceded, interrupted or followed by a sermon in prose, others by a prayer, as for instance the miracle “Jean le Palu“. The sermons, short in general, contain a fatiguing mysticism and are for the most part irrelevant to the piece. Several mysteries are followed by a Sirvantois couronné**), others by a Sirvantois estrivé**), or by an envoi or dedication.

*) Perfaict, Histoire du théâtre français, vol. I, p. 158.

**) There is no exact equivalent in English for these expressions. The Sirvantois couronné was a love song, generally satirical or humorous at the same time, to which the

The moralities have seldom more than a thousand to twelve hundred verses; the farces and sotties generally not more than five hundred, but there are frequent exceptions. The mysteries are generally much longer, they contain often more than 40,000 verses; the *Mystery of the Passion* retouched by J. Michel, even more than 67,000 verses. In dramas intended for the stage, the stage-play is indicated by a few words in prose, in the present tense, for instance: "Now the Saracens kill all the christians"; or: "Here all sing together, and then *Nostre-Dame* goes to offer sacrifice, the others following"; or: "Here comes *Théophile* to *Saladin*".

As to the metre, there exist a great variety in these dramas. The "*Miracle de Théophile*" by Rutebeuf, is written for the most part in verses of four feet, but the author several times changes its form. The lamentations of *Théophile* owning his crime, are expressed in twelve strophes or couplets of four alexandrines each. The prayer to the Virgin consists of nine strophes in verses of three feet and the exhortation of the bishop to the people contains five stanzas, of four verses each having a rime féminine. In the "*Jeu de Saint Nicolas*" by Jean Bodel, there are also verses of different measures, now rimes croisées, now croisées

crown of laurel had been awarded by the Queen of Love. The *Sirvantois estrivé* was a love song, in which two or more poets strove against each other in alternate strophes for the prize.

et redoublées. The piece "Dispute du Croisé et du non-Croisé" is composed of thirty couplets, each of eight verses the rhymes of which are alternately single and double (masculines et féminines) except only in four strophes. The exposition takes up the first five couplets, the other twenty five are delivered in dialogue by the two disputants. Another piece on the device of the cardinal de Tournon: "Non quae super terram", is written in verses whose rhymes have all an echo, that is to say, there is a double rhyme at the end of every verse.

The language is sometimes inaccurate both as regards inflection and style; it was also unsettled and changed frequently in both these respects, showing the infancy of the language whose idiom becomes fixed only when mature. The art of epigrammatic and satiric writing being little known, the expressions were often rude, unadorned and even coarse and violent. In the farce "the Theologastres" attributed to the XVIth century, satire first begins to appear in its modern dress; on the other hand the very naivete and infantine simplicity of the language employed possess of themselves a sort of native, natural charm, often wanting to the productions of a more matured idiom. The pieces are not destitute either of vigorous or of picturesque passages; some lines show a certain degree of richness and beauty of language and occasional indications of a high order of pathetic and elevated thought. The old dramatists generally succeeded best in verses of energy,

which, however, occasionally degenerates into extravagance, as their elevation is sometimes exaggerated into bombast.

The subject in these dramas is often rather obscure, and as their sense and purport do not always develop themselves, they frequently require a long commentary. The succession of events is sometimes without probability, and in many the mixture of horror and gaiety shocks the modern sense of even stage propriety. The works of the middle ages abound in such horrible scenes and are generally treated with care and painstaking. What more horrible scene can be imagined than a piece of Pierre Gringore, where a hangman about to execute a young child gloats over his cruel task, exultingly exhibits it to the audience and describes it as *une épousee* and *tendre comme rosée*.

But on the other hand, there are many praise-worthy points in these dramas; ideas and expressions which long uncurrent and therefore still new and with their freshness, not worn out by long friction, may yet form a mine of real gold to the authors who shall know how to utilize them. These old dramas are by no means destitute of imagination, of enthusiasm and of originality; they often show sublimity and scenes of striking contrast. The entry of the Saviour into Jerusalem and his prophecies are imposing. Although he is welcomed by a part of the people holding branches and singing joyful songs, he says, applying to Jerusalem:

"Le peuple fait joye,

*Mais mon cueur larmoye
Si te laisse nue".*

Jayrus:
"Fille de Syon,
En dévotion
Tu reçois ton roy . . ."

Jésus:
"Lamentation,
Désolation
Sur toy venir voy".

Comic scenes will especially be found in the above mentioned curious and interesting piece which is regarded as the first specimen of the French comic stage, "Maître Pierre Patelin". In this piece the transition from *sottie* and farce to regular comedy is plainly perceptible. The author has succeeded well in the humorous delineation of character, as well as in probability and variety of incident. Real comedy is also to be found in an interlude of the Mystery of the Passion, where the rogue Claquedent is cheated by his colleague Babin.

The allegory in some pieces is obscure and frigid, but in others full of truth and vitality, as in a scene of the Mystery of the Passion, where Judas is approached by Despair, instigating him to suicide.

The art of description often shows itself in a high degree of perfection. Gringore especially offers the reader of his dramas many good pictures of human characters. What a beautiful picture that of an *enfant sans souci*

who being reproached by his mother on account of his follies, answers:

*“Paix, paix! vous n’y entendez rien,
Voulez-vous que bigot je soye,
Et que le monde point me voie?
Pardieu! vous la me baillez belle!
Tenir me voulez en tutelle...
Toujours me tenez tost et tart
Ainsi qu’on ferait d’un novice...
Taisez-vous: je suis assez grant
Pour faire ce que j’ai affaire.
. . . Vous avez beau braire
Je ferai comme je l’entends...
A gaudir nous baignons,
Et faisons mille bonnes chères,
Et n’y a choses tant soient chères
Qu’on n’ait par argent. Sans doubtaunce
Passer temps vueil, vivre à plaisance,
Tandis que je suis en jeunesse;
Et mais que je vienne en vieillesse,
Je prendray travail et soucy*)”.*

With what a force and naivete are traced the characters of Guillaume and Agnelet in Patelin!

What a lively description of horror and despair is afforded by the last words of the parting soul of Judas!

*“Ah! mauldicte âme malheuree,
Enragée et désespérée . . .*

*) O. Leroy, Etudes sur les Mystères, p. 342.

*Le ver de dur remort
 Sans fin me poingt et mord,
 Et demeure obstinée;
 Mais en mon dolent tort
 Je ne quiers réconfort,
 Puisque je suis damnée"*)*.

In the piece of "A young wife called Théodore who for her sins disguises herself as a man, and to do penance, turns monk and is kept as a man until her death", passages of religious eloquence and classical beauty will be found:

Théodore:

*"Qu'ay je fait! j'ay mon mariage
 Brisé, et à perdicion
 Mis m'âme, et à destruccion
 Ma biauté, mon honneur, mon corps.
 Ha, très doux Dieu miséricors!
 Comment ay-je esté si surprise!
 Lasse! lasse! à tort m'en avise;
 Certes du dueil morir vouldroie.
 Lasse! jamais jour n'aray joie,
 Et à bon droit!"**)*

The French dramatic literature of the middle ages reflects faithfully the features, moral, social and intellectual, of the people among whom it arose. It is especially to the Mystery of the Passion the subject of which is immense, that this observation may be applied. This

*) O. Leroy, *Etudes sur les Mystères*, p. 260.

**) Ibid. p. 73.

mystery, by the religious horror of its subject, the roughness of its style and customs, the incoherent mass of its scenes, partly barbarous, partly frivolous, traversed here and there by beams of intellectual light, is perhaps the truest picture of the French society of that time any where to be found.

The dramatists seem to have endeavoured to trace in the persons and things they placed dramatically before the people, such scenes of common life as they had before their eyes. Every populace they show us, is French; men and women, manners and customs have always the French type. The reader meets often in these dramas with descriptions of the most frivolous manners of that epoch. To know the language of a 'fashionable' lady and a gallant of the XVth century, he only needs read the conversation between Magdalen as a great sinner, and her chamber maids, and afterwards between her and her admirer. Magdalen says to her maid: "I will be prepared, adorned and painted to make all look at me . . . Give me quick my mirror . . . fetch my scents and my balm". Her maid: "I think, there is no lady in the whole world who has more accoutrements". Magdalen: "Am I now shining enough?" The maid: "Beautiful as a picture!*)" After having ordered her velvet-cap and her ear-rings, Magdalen says:

"Dressez ces tapis et carreaux.

Respandez tost ces fines eaux,

Les bonnes odeurs, par la place;

*) O. Leroy, Etudes sur les Mystères, p. 214.

Jetez tout, vuydez les vaisseaux :

Je veuil qu'on me suive à la trace)“.*

The gallant, the count of Rodigon, entering her boudoir, says:

“Très belle et gracieuse face,

Qui tout deuil et chagrin efface,

Et dechasse

Tout danger;

Vostre heureuse accointance trasse

Et veuil du tout à vostre grâce

Me ranger”.

Magdalen :

“Gentil escuyer gracieux,

A face pleine et rians yeux,

Très joyeux,

Sans changer;

Très bien venez, car, sur mes dieux,

Je ne vous quiers en plaisans jeux

*Estranger**).”.*

Afterwards Magdalen's sister Martha gives the following picture of her character:

“Je me travaille et me desbats

En fervente sollicitude,

Et à ménager hault et bas

Sogneusement metz mon estude.

La vie active est assez rude

Qui curieusement la maine

*) O. Leroy, Etudes sur les Mystères, p. 216.

**) Ibid p. 217.

*Mais Dieu en rend béatitude
Lassus, en l'éternel domaine*)'.*

A scene of the "Marriage at Cana" shows the true picture of merry drinking fellows. When Christ had ordered 6 vases filled with water to be brought in, one of these people swears: "I will not wet my teeth with it!" Another, after having tasted the liquor, cries:

*"Ha! vécy du vin le plus fort!
Le plus délié, le meilleur,
Le plus sec, plus cler en couleur
Qu' oncques langue d'omme goustal
Oncques de vigne ne goustal
Goute de vin plus délié**)!"*

Then all are drinking and drinking again, till at last, one of them breaks out in the following bacchic song:

*"Si scavoye faire ce qui'l faict,
Toute la mer de Galilée
Seroit ennuyt en vin muée
Et jamais sur terre n'auroit
Goute d'eau, ne plouveroit
Rien du ciel que tout ne fust vin***)!"*

The scene of the two rogues Claquedent and Babin and the dialogue between the bad malefactor, the good malefactor and Barrabas prove that knavish tricks have been practised at all times.

It is evident that the dramatic writings of the middle

*) Parfaict, Histoire du théâtre français, vol. I, p. 225.

**) O. Leroy, Etudes sur les Mystères, p. 136.

***) Ibid. p. 137.

ages, though totally devoid of philosophical system or general knowledge, and exhibiting a complete want of critical discrimination between trifling and important events, are nevertheless extremely valuable; since they are not only vast storehouses of facts which the modern historian can sift and classify, but also, as we have seen, monuments of the language and pictures of the society of their time, neither is our finding them mixed with much childish and insignificant detail, without its value as giving us an insight into the life and opinions of their period.

From a moral point of view, many of these dramas are, in some measure, much to be condemned, because they contain audacious attacks upon religion and other holy things. The holiest songs of the church are often parodied; the words: "Venite adoremus!" are transformed in: "Venite potemus!" In "le Tavernier et le Pion" the inkeeper, to extol his wine, makes use of Holy Writ in the following manner:

*"Amen, amen, dico vobis,
J'ay vin pour resjouir son homme;
Et habitavit in nobis
Du pays de Grèce ou de Rome.
Sachez que n'est point vin de Somme,
Aspectus ejus ut fulgur.
C'est ung vin, bref, qui tout assomme,
Et postea videbitur*)".*

In the "Farce of the Miller whose soul is car-

*) O. Leroy, Etudes sur les mystères, p. 397.

ried away by the devil to hell" the miller who suspects his wife of infidelity, says to the parson: "Doleful is my heart and filled with perplexity, for I know very well that I am a poor cuckold", and the curate answers: "Benedicite"!

There are other pieces in which grave scenes are mixed with those coarse pleasantries which shock the modern reader, and which are especially met with in the dramas written towards the end of the XVth century. The mystery "Actes des Apôtres" contains the following dialogue spoken by the hangmen who were about stoning Saint Paul to death:

"Bring me! — What? — A flint-stone. — Give me a hard stone. — But where shall I find one? — Never mind. — Are you coming? — Wait a moment, j'ay mis ma main en une ordure*)"!

The authors of the farces were often unequal to the task of carrying out their own ideas, which though elevated, did not prevent their sinking into grossness; plain-spoken frankness degenerated into licentiousness, and instead of exhibiting vice in all its horror, they seem sometimes to gloat over immoral descriptions, in which the vilest indecency was paraded with unblushing impudence, and which, of course, tended to the corruption of the society of that period.

"Le Retraict", the before mentioned "Farce du meunier de qui le diable emporte l'âme en

*) Parfaict, Histoire du théâtre français, vol. II, p. 375.

enfer" and the "Farce du savetier" belong to the category of obscene dramas.

Under these circumstances the theatre was incessantly attacked in sermons and by decrees and was more than once suspended by the parliament. But dramatic entertainments so engrossed the passions of the people that they (often protected by the court), reclaimed them again and again.

Most of the dramas were, however, inspired by morality, and had, therefore, a favourable influence upon all classes. They contain severe attacks against abuses in church and state. In those centuries where despotism had so few and so feeble limits, the princes could learn from these religious pieces that there is no difference before God between a king and a shepherd, and the tribunals could see that there is a supreme tribunal to which one day they would have to give an account for their judgments. The holy crucifix was for the Caiphas and Pilates an accusing sign. Or the dramatists combated the vices of the priests, the abuses which had crept into holy church herself, but in general respected the public worship and especially the dogmas of religion. Sometimes it was the vices and crimes of the common people which they endeavoured to abate. In 1502 there appeared the morality "Des Blasphémateurs du nom de Dieu". This piece is said to have been composed to support the ordinances of Philippe-Auguste and Saint-Louis, as well as the remonstrances of the clergy, against the sacrilegious excesses of the people and the use of blasphemous language. Thus the

theatre concurred with the government and even with the church to exercise a public censorship over morals. The "Life of Saint Martin by personages" was composed, as we are told by a notice in this play, "that the common people might easily see and hear how the noble patron had lived holily and devoutly". It is thus seen that the old dramatists intended to instruct and educate the people by grand examples, and their writings are certainly not destitute of personages worthy of imitation for all time.

What an eminent example of piety is afforded by queen Blanche, addressing her son in the following lines:

*"Mon amy, mon cher fils Loys,
Plus aymer je ne te sçauroye
Que je fais: mais mieulx aymeroye . . .
Mon fils, posé que tu soyes roy,
A te veoir mourir devant moy
Que te veoir ung péchié cometre*)".*

What a noble courage and resignation is painted by Bodel in the following verses ("Jeu de Saint Nicolas"):

Les chrétiens:

*"Saint sépulcre, aidez-nous! — Allons, amis, courage!
Sarrasins et païens accourent pleins de rage.
Voyez leur fer briller. Mon coeur bondit de joie,
Qu'aujourd'hui la prouesse au grand jour se déploie
Contre chacun de nous est une armée entière".*

Un chrétien:

"Seigneurs, n'en doutez point, c'est notre heure dernière.

*) O. Leroy, Etudes sur les Mystères, p. 317.

Je sais qu'en combattant pour Dieu nous y mourrons.

Je vendrai bien mon sang, si ce fer ne se rompt.

Rien ne résistera, ni casques ni hauberts.

Au service de Dieu nous tomberons offerts;

Paradis sera nôtre, à eux sera enfers:

Ils s'élancent sur nous, qu'ils rencontrent nos fers!"

Can we, after this, be surprised that Charles VI encouraged the *Confrères de la Passion* by his letters-patent "afin qu'un chacun par dévotion se puisse et doibve adjoindre à iceux"? The influence of these dramatic pieces was, on the whole, favourable, the more so as the time in which they were written and represented was an age, when the great mass of the laity, from the highest to the lowest, were in a state of extreme ignorance, and when the little learning that then existed was exclusively in the hand of ecclesiastics. Hence the importance of employing so obvious and popular an expedient for communicating some elementary religious instruction to the people, gratifying the curiosity of their rude hearers at the same time that actors and authors sought to extend and strengthen knowledge and morality.

We have no record of any original dramatic composition belonging to this age in France, with the exception of these old dramas which are considered, and justly indeed, as antetypes of the regular drama.

The first theatre was, as we have seen, established at Paris about the year 1400 by the *Confrérie de la Passion* for the representation of Scriptural mysteries. This was suppressed by the parliament in 1547, on ac-

count of the scandal which this devout buffoonery had begun to give. The company of actors purchased next year the Hôtel de la Bourgogne, and were authorised by the parliament to represent profane subjects 'lawful and decent', but enjoined to abstain from all mysteries of the Passion, or other sacred mysteries. The culmination of the Confrérie was now over. From about the year 1540 we find translations from Latin, Greek and Italian dramas into French: the period of the Renaissance begun and made pale the old religious representations which from that time gradually disappeared from the stage. The general taste, influenced by Jodelle's spectacles, having thus taken another direction, the Confrères, conceiving that under these circumstances they could not concur with the Comédiens, resolved voluntarily to retreat, pretending that the representation of profane pieces would not be suitable for them.

After their happy days under Louis XII, the Basochiens, in 1516, were forbidden to play farces or sotties in which allusion was made to princes or princesses. In 1538, when François I established the theatrical censorship, the actors were obliged, upon pain of imprisonment to retrench such passages of their pieces as were erased by the censor, and some years after, the delinquents were even menaced with the death punishment 'de la hart'. Thus "cabined, cribbed, confined", the society de la Basoche received at last its coup de grâce from Public Opinion which gradually abandoned their performances for the imitations of the antique.
